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"ACE-IN-THE-HOLE:"

FEDERAL NAVAL OPERATIONS
DURING
THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

Ritchie Hugh Belser, III
Commander, USN

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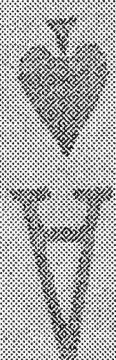
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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Naval Operations During The American Civil War

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Civil War history is usually concerned with the opposing field armies, their leaders, and their victories. Less has been written and discussed about the two navies roles during the War Between the States.

The Federal Navy was heavily tasked by and critically important to the Lincoln administrations' war strategy. That strategy, General Winfield Scott's "Anaconda Plan," was energetically executed by the Union Navy and proved to be a significant factor for ultimate Union victory.

The Confederate Navy attempted to counter Union strategy by developing two new types of ships (ironclads and blockade runners), as well as producing two new underwater weapons (submarines and mines). Though the new Confederate technologies were no match for the numerical advantage enjoyed by the Union Navy, their role in the Civil War was noteworthy, and they will be seen again in two upcoming world wars.

The federal maritime strategy of blockading the southern coastline and seizing control of the Mississippi caused severe military, psychological and economic challenges for the South. Regarding combined Army-Navy operations employed by the North, Vicksburg proved to be a superb example of federal "joint operations" strategy .

The Union Navy, which became Mr. Lincoln's "ace-in-the hole," was instrumental in many Union Army victories. It was the superior Civil War naval force and force multiplier which Mr. Lincoln and his strategists came to depend upon and which significantly contributed to preserving the Union.

NAVAL OPERATIONS
DURING
THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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COMMANDER RITCHIE HUGH BELSER, III
UNITED STATES NAVY

Commander Belser was born in San Bernardino, California in 1955. He graduated from Wagner High School, Clark Air Base, Philippines in 1973 and attended the University of South Carolina, graduating in 1977 with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism.

In May 1979, then Ensign Belser was commissioned at Newport, Rhode Island after graduating from Officer Candidate School. Following commissioning, he was temporarily assigned as Operations Officer in the oceangoing minesweeper USS FEARLESS (MSO 442) pending the return of his ship, USS ILLUSIVE (MSO 448) from a Mediterranean deployment. He reported aboard USS ILLUSIVE (MSO 448) in September 1979 and served as Engineer Officer until March 1982. During his tour, ILLUSIVE operated in the Straits of Florida in support of the Cuban Law Enforcement Operations and deployed to Northern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Following Weapons Officer School, he reported to USS GALLERY (FEG 26) in April 1983 as Ordnance Officer. While deployed to the Mediterranean and Arabian Gulf he led GALLERY's Self Defense Force Team. GALLERY conducted patrols off the coasts of Beirut and Nicaragua, and also deployed to the Persian Gulf. Commander Belser attended the German Language Course at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California in 1985 and subsequently served with the German Navy. Living on the North Sea in Wilhelmshaven, Germany from July 1985 to September 1987, he served in two German Navy ships, the FGS VOLKLINGEN and FGS ULM, followed by a staff tour as an assistant Operations Officer for exercise planning with the German Minewarfare Fleet.

In 1988, Commander Belser graduated from Surface Warfare Officers School and was assigned as Operations Officer of the Pearl Harbor-based destroyer USS BENJAMIN STODDERT (DDG 22). Following his initial department head tour he was assigned as Operations Officer of the cruiser USS GRIDLEY (CG 21). Next he attended Executive Officers School in Newport, Rhode Island, and reported as Executive Officer of the destroyer USS ELLIOT (DD 967) in December 1991.

Subsequent to his executive officer tour, Commander Belser was assigned to the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5) on the Joint Staff, Washington, DC. In June 1994, Commander Belser was selected to attend the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama. Following graduation in June 1995, he will attend Spanish language training at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, and then be assigned to the US Military Group in Guatemala City, Guatemala in May 1996.

Commander Belser's personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy commendation Medal and two Navy Achievement Medals.

III

INTRODUCTION

The United States Navy was President Abraham Lincoln's "ace-in-the-hole" during the Civil War. Serious academic debate by military historians may never satisfactorily answer questions about the superiority of one opposing field army over another. Informed historic comparisons regarding the military superiority of principal general officers...Lee versus Grant, or Jackson versus Sherman... are also inconclusive. However, few could disagree that the successful federal grand strategy proposed in 1861 by Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief U. S. Army, heavily tasked the fledgling Union Navy-and that the U. S. Navy significantly contributed to preserving the Union.

The maritime component of the federal grand strategy for preserving the Union included a naval blockade of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and support of the Army in the Western theater, specifically along the Mississippi River. "Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles acknowledged these objectives in his annual report for 1861, when he affirmed Union naval strategy as follows:"

1. The closing of all the insurgent ports along a coast of nearly three thousand miles, in the form and under the exacting regulations of an international blockade, including the naval occupation and defense of the Potomac river...
2. The organization of combined naval and military expeditions to operate in force against various points of the southern coast, rendering efficient naval cooperations with the position and movements of such expeditions when landed, and including also all needful naval aid to the army in cutting intercommunication with the rebels and in its operations on the Mississippi and its tributaries; and

3. The active pursuit of the piratical cruisers which might escape the blockading force. (1:54)

Execution of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott's strategy began when President Lincoln issued the proclamation for a naval blockade--from South Carolina to Texas on 19 April 1861--only four days subsequent to the Federal surrender of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor (1:54). As Robert M. Browning, Jr. describes in his book about the Union blockade in a chapter titled "The Navy's Response to War:"

"Scott proposed to defeat the South by a combination of a naval blockade and pressure applied by the army from all points, in the fashion of a snake that kills its victim by constriction. Scott's farsighted scheme was aptly called the Anaconda Plan, and the Union eventually followed Scott's basic premise.

The Navy began the war with the vision of providing only the coils of the Anaconda. But, as the war developed, it would also offer the striking power of a venomous snake. Lincoln's call for a blockade, which created the need for a large Navy, may have been his wisest wartime decision." (2:1)

Federal military strategy gained a further advantage due to the superior federal Navy: the tremendous power of "combined arms" operations. The advantages achieved by combining the Army and Navy into one team provided the commander increased flexibility, more re-supply options (i.e., not depending on bridges or railroads), and an ability to rapidly maneuver against an entrenched Army. General U. S. Grant's success at Vicksburg was due in large part to his ability to combine Navy mobility with Army firepower. In the book, Civil War Chronology, a quote appeared which succinctly describes "combined arms:"

"The sea and land, indeed, so perfectly complement each other wherever water reaches, that they become like the left and right arms of a boxer. When an Army without

sea power meets an enemy that enjoys superiority afloat, it is like a boxer with one hand tied behind his back trying to fight a champion. (3:XIV)"

Nowhere is this more apparent or easily illustrated than the "war in the West," where federal gunboats swept Confederate forces from the Mississippi River, thereby splitting the South and regaining control of the vital Mississippi River. Battles were fought from Cairo, Illinois to New Orleans, Louisiana--culminating with the victorious siege of the "Gibraltar of the Mississippi"--Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 4, 1863.

In his introduction to Civil War Naval Chronology, (1861-1865) Rear Admiral (ret) Ernest McNeill Eller wrote:

This ceaseless influence of operations at sea in the Civil War has been comprehended by few Americans. Had the North prosecuted the war at sea less vigorously and successfully, or the South more effectively, the history of America and the world could have been radically changed...power afloat on the western rivers was the spearhead for the giant drives that fatally severed the South. From Fort Donelson, Fort Henry and Island 10 to New Orleans, events in the West that proved decisive in the war lay along the rivers. (3:XI, XII)

Without a potent Navy, or the oft hoped for intervention of a European power, the Confederate States of America (CSA) could not succeed in militarily defeating an industrialized North. The two Navies were never comparable in size, resources, or organization: The federals had the makings of an operational fleet in April 1861, coupled with vastly superior resources and nearly a century of operational experience. The rebels had nothing, except that which they had seized at the war's beginning.

It is important to note at this point that the major land battles of 1861 and '62 weren't going well for the North. Federal forces in the Eastern theater were simply trading blows with the Confederate armies--and being defeated as evidenced by failures at Bull

Run (Summer 1861), the Peninsular Campaign (Spring 1862), Fredericksburg (Winter 1862), and Chancellorsville (Spring 1863). Clear-cut naval dominance in the Western Theater enabled President Lincoln and his cabinet to not only win battles along the Mississippi River, but as will become clear later in the conflict, to parlay victory "in theater" to total victory.

Military defeat of the Confederacy was slow but inevitable--due, in large part,--to the superior Federal Navy. In support of this premise, my research included: 1) analysis of the conditions within both Navies, 2) assessment of Federal Maritime Strategy (specifically the coastal blockade and Mississippi River strategies), 3) review of Confederate counter strategy, and 4) examination of the battles for Vicksburg from a "combined arms" perspective.

IV

THE NAVIES

A. U. S. NAVY

The United States Navy was undergoing a revolution during the year 1861. Transitioning from sail to steam and wooden ships to armored ones (ironclads) were two key changes during this era. The Union fleet consisted of less than 90 ships, and half of these were rigged for sails. It has been generally agreed upon by Civil War maritime historians that..."There were in active commission 42 ships." (4:47) What the Federal Navy lacked in material it made up for in manpower--both quantitatively and qualitatively. Bern Anderson, his book, *By Sea and By River* noted:

"...the officers and men were professionals and the nature of their profession was such that amateurs seeking high rank were not attracted to it. There was nothing to compare with the "political generals" that burdened both armies...When the Navy was called upon to expand rapidly, it had a pool of Merchant Marine officers to draw upon..." (5: 9, 10)

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was the architect and driving force behind the rapid buildup and initial employment of his fledgling fleet. He was ably assisted by Gustavus V. Fox, Assistant Secretary, who was named to that position on 8 May 1861, by President Lincoln. (11:50) This insightful observation regarding Fox appeared in Richard West's *Mr. Lincoln's Navy*:

Fox was as honest, forthright, and daring as Gideon Welles, but without the latter's reticence. Whereas the latter was given to secret speculation, and silent and even crafty analyses of the men who served under him in the Navy, Fox was open, hearty, jovial, ready at all times to let anyone fill his ear with gossip so long as he had patriotic intent and a genuine desire to get the job done. Fox was the ideal

liaison officer, able to approach congressmen, officials in other departments, shipowners, manufacturers, whoever might have business with the Navy. And, speaking the language of naval officers, he was at his best in obtaining their confidence. He was their friend at court, and they in turn--all types of naval officers--made him their confidant, told him their joys, sorrows, problems, difficulties. He was as gay, as big-hearted and generous, as Mr. Welles was tightfisted and secretive. The two of them got on perfectly together, the one sitting quietly at the helm holding a steady course, the effervescent assistant forever darting here and yonder to seek out the best channel to steer through. (11:51)

The U. S. Navy had 1,300 officers and 7,500 men at war's start, and these numbers would swell to 6,700 officers and 51,500 sailors, and a budget of \$123,000,000 by 1865. (6:39) Unfortunately, they had neither the numbers or types of ships required for the operations envisioned by President Lincoln, and the new Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. The flurry of activity during the next several months was focused on: 1) converting merchantships and river boats to men-of-war, by adding guns, 2) purchasing or building fast steam powered sloops and gunboats rigged with multiple cannons and armor (ironclads). Building up a fleet and then employing it would be a monumental task for Union leadership--and would be marked by initial failures, followed by eventual success.

One example of the confused atmosphere, and an early Union failure, was the loss of Fort Sumter in April 1861, due to miscommunications and failure to properly support the Federal troops garrisoned in Charleston. As a result of secretive interference by Secretary of State William Henry Seward, and President Lincoln himself, the principal troop ship USS POWHATTAN was diverted from the Fort Sumter re-supply and reinforcement expedition. As a result, Major Robert Anderson and his garrison were compelled to surrender rather than be starved out. (11: 15-27)

A second early failure was the loss of the federal government's main shipyard at Gosport (now called Norfolk) on April 20, 1861.

"The Navy Department took very early precautionary measures looking to the security of the station, but hesitation and indecision marked the conduct of the commander of the yard, and he seemed continually influenced by a desire to avoid any act by which Virginia might be offended." (12:22)

The losses at Fort Sumter and Norfolk in April, though serious, were to be offset by the successful rapid organization of the Atlantic and Gulf Blockading Squadrons and formation of the Union Naval Forces on the western rivers.

B. CONFEDERATE STATES NAVY

In comparison to the Union Navy, what about the South? By all accounts, the CSA had no Navy at the start of the war. As author Bruce Catton described the situation:

"The South lacked a Merchant Marine and a seafaring population,...had very little in the way of shipyards and the industrial plant that could build machinery and armament for warships..." (6: 173)

The South did benefit greatly from the April 20, 1861 capture of the Norfolk Navy yard including more than twelve hundred powerful cannons which would later see service in coastal and riverine forts of the CSA, throughout the remainder of the war. Col Trever N. Dupuy (USA, ret.) noted in his book, *The Compact History of the Civil War*:

"A grievous handicap to the U. S. Navy at first was the seizure of all its Southern yards and installations, the Norfolk Navy yard being the most serious loss. Here the fine steam frigate, USS MERRIMACK, and a large quantity of Naval stores and armament--including 52 modern 9 inch Dahlgren guns--were seized by Virginia militia." (7: 12)

Though they lacked the materiel of war, few doubted the South lacked initiative and resourcefulness. One example was the salvaging of the newly constructed steam ship, USS MERRIMACK, scuttled by Union troops, refloated by the rebels and recommissioned as the ironclad, CSS VIRGINIA. Also, the Confederate Navy is credited with developing the torpedo (sea mine) and the submarine--both of which saw service in the war. The CSA Navy assumed the tactical defensive, with few exceptions, throughout the war. Reinforcement of the coastal defenses at Wilmington, Charleston, Mobile, and New Orleans assumed high priority for the hastily organizing Confederates.

Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Russell Mallory, was convinced that ironclad ships would substantially offset the numerical advantages of the Union Fleet. On May 8, 1861, he wrote: "I regard the possession of an iron armored ship as a matter of the first necessity. Such a vessel at this time could traverse the entire coast of the United States, prevent all blockades, and encounter, with a fair prospect of success, their entire Navy." (14:220)

The outlook for the "Confederate Forces Afloat," and their new secretary, was bleak. As described in the U. S. Navy's official account of the Civil War, Civil War Naval Chronology "Confederate Forces Afloat" was defined as a wide range of militarily employed craft and ships, whether under control of the Navy Department, Army, Confederate States government, or remained under individual state government control.

To further illuminate the state of activities surrounding the hastily organizing Confederate Navy, the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships. Vol II includes this comment:

The Government of the Confederate States of America got underway in the spring of 1861, totally unprepared from a naval standpoint to uphold the independence it had declared. The Confederacy lacked adequate means to conduct an offensive or defensive war, wanting in ships to (defend its long coastline and inland waters, to carry the war to Northern shores, or to conduct the foreign trade vital to existence. To this bleak outlook was added but limited hope and possibility for construction or acquiring a navy. Nevertheless, inspired determination and ingenuity, evinced particularly by the more than 300 able officers who resigned from the United States Navy to support the Southern cause, culminated in the rapid appearance of many varied types of forces afloat under the Confederate flag.

Some ships served under direct army control. The Mississippi River Defense Fleet, composed of 14 ships manned by the army and under the overall command of Capt. J. E. Montgomery, CSN, was one such organization which operated during 1862. A second army group, the Texas Marine Department, established in 1861, was charged with the defense of coastal waters and rivers, especially in the vicinity of Galveston. The

Department employed more than 25 ships, including gunboats, transports, repair ships, and coal barges. Elsewhere, the army carried men and material over the river highways in transports that they controlled, manned, and sometimes captained. (3:VI-182)

Due to inadequate ship construction facilities, specialized shipbuilding material, and lack of hard currency, the Confederates never accumulated more than a few hundred ships and boats, compared to "670 vessels (warships) in commission" for the North. (7:39)

One successful type of ship the South commissioned was the 150-310 foot long ironclad gunboats with names like CSS PALMETTO STATE, HUNTSVILLE, ATLANTA, MISSISSIPPI, CHARLESTON, RICHMOND and STONEWALL. These gunboats were either single or twin-screw and carried from 4 to 20 guns depending on the length of the ship. (3:VI-185,186)

Other types and classes of typical ships of the C.S. Navy included wooden gunboats, torpedo launches, commerce raiders, sidewheel blockade runners, schooners, coastal steamers and sloops. The romantic names of some--CSS ALAMO, ALABAMA, ARKANSAS, BEAUFORT, CATAWBA, DIXIE, LONE STAR, PHANTOM, TEXAS, VICKSBURG and WASP--remind us of our pre Civil War heritage and some are namesakes of U. S. Navy ships in the current fleet.

FEDERAL MARITIME STRATEGY

A. THE BLOCKADE

The spring and summer of 1861 were spent busily organizing the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts blockade (declared by President Lincoln on 19 April), and procuring the necessary ships to ensure it was properly effected. Foremost in the minds of President Lincoln and his advisors--Secretary of State William Henry Seward, Secretary of War Simon Cameron, General-in-Chief of the Army Winfield Scott, and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, was the fear of foreign intervention. By establishing a blockade, the federal leadership hoped to economically isolate the rebel states from Europe. However, the big question was whether the Europeans, specifically the British and French, would respect a blockade of southern ports. The answer was soon forthcoming. In Robert M. Browning, Jr.'s book, From Cape Charles to Cape Fear (The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War) he wrote:

Secretary of State William Henry Seward persuaded Lincoln to adopt a blockade. Seward knew that blockades were recognized by most of the nations of the world, which might help avoid international complications. By issuing a notification of a blockade, the Union implicitly gave the Confederacy belligerent status, because a blockade is usually a belligerent right and implies that there is fighting with an external enemy. Ignoring the fact that he did not have a large navy, Lincoln declared what was for many months, in effect, a paper blockade and announced his intention to stop Southern trade. Some believed that a comprehensive blockade would require as few as thirty vessels and that as few as six ships could effectively blockade the ports of both North Carolina and Virginia. The British government announced its neutrality on 13 May 1861. The British did not protest Lincoln's intentions to blockade the South, because their long-term naval interests lay in expanding and maintaining the blockade practice. Although the American blockade annoyed them, created animosities, and was at times inconvenient, Britain, as the world's foremost

maritime power, knew it would establish convenient precedents for them in the future. The London Times summed up this feeling by stating that "the normal state of this country in time of war is that of a belligerent, and,...blockade is by far the most formidable weapon we possess. Surely we ought not to be over ready to blunt its edge or injure its temper?" France confirmed its acceptance of the blockade three days after the British on 16 May. With French support, it became clear that Europe would recognize the United States blockade if it were executed according to international law. This apparently resolved one of the Union's earliest and gravest problems. (2:5)

To successfully organize and employ the blockading fleet now became Secretary Welles' first priority. Author, Richard S. West, Jr., in Mr. Lincoln's Navy wrote:

...the character of the coast line of the Southern states and its implications for the Federal blockade were imperfectly understood. Welles appointed a fact-finding and strategy-forming board to study the littoral of the South Atlantic states. Captain S. F. Du Pont, who had helped to open the route to Washington, was called to the capital to head this board. Meanwhile, Welles recalled ships from foreign stations and set up three squadrons, the Atlantic Blockading Squadron ..., the Gulf Blockading Squadron ..., and the Home Squadron in the West Indies.... The first two put into effect Mr. Lincoln's blockade; the third answered the early hue and cry of New York insurance companies for protection of the California treasure ships from Confederate privateers and commerce raiders.

To procure enough ships to cover the Southern coast, Welles, during the first nine months, repaired and recommissioned from the old Navy 76, purchased 136, and constructed 52, for a total of 264 ships, and during this time the number of seamen jumped from 7,600 to 22,000. (11 :52)

The newly appointed Blockade Strategy Board not only considered specific littoral problems in devising blockade strategy, they also "planned amphibious operations to seize vital bases on the Southern coast. Recommendations made by the Blockade Strategy Board had a profound effect on the course of the conflict and pointed the way to the successful naval actions at Hatteras Inlet, Port Royal and New Orleans. The broad policies the board early set forth were essentially followed to their culmination at Appomattox." (3: I-17)

The Blockade Strategy Board met several times weekly, usually at the Smithsonian. A fundamental new development--steam powered propulsion--became the board's most fundamental 'problem' to solve. The 'problem' was that blockaders had to continuously resupply their coal reserves and unless coaling stations were near their operating areas, they would either be 'off station' for long periods or many ships would be required in order to keep ships on patrol. (8:54)

The next issue the blockade strategists had to address was proper stationing of the blockade ships. In *Lifeline of the Confederacy* (Blockade running during the Civil War), author, Stephen R. Wise wrote:

It took time for the United States Navy to put a blockade into effect. Slowly warships and converted merchantmen began to take their position off Southern ports. As was the custom, the commander of the vessels would serve notice to the Confederate authorities of the establishment of the blockade, and a grace period of fifteen days would be given for neutral vessels to leave port. Any ship approaching the city would be warned off, and, if caught again, seized. On April 30, 1861, Norfolk became the first blockaded port. Slightly less than a month later, on May 28, Charleston, Savannah, and Mobile received notification, followed by New Orleans on the thirty-first. On July 2, Galveston was blockaded and, almost as an afterthought, on July 21 the small converted merchantman *Daylight* placed Wilmington under blockade. Even before the blockaders appeared off the Southern ports, the great exodus of shipping had begun. During May and June the majority of foreign vessels left, often before the blockade was established. At New Orleans a special arrangement had to be made to allow tugboats to pull foreign vessels out of the Mississippi River. (10:25)

Initially the blockade organization designed by the Navy Department and Blockade Strategy Board was comprised of only two squadrons. They were named the Coast Blockading Squadron (Atlantic Seaboard), and the Gulf Blockading Squadron (Gulf of Mexico). The Coast Squadron was later divided into the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, responsible for the coastline of Virginia and North Carolina, and the south

Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The latter assumed responsibility for the area from the North Carolina-South Carolina border to Key West, Florida. In January 1862, the Gulf Squadron was subdivided into the East and West Gulf Blockading Squadrons, with the dividing point being Pensacola. The Navy's blockade organization remained under these - four squadrons for the duration of the war. (9:2)

What then was the impact of the blockade? Or better, how effective was the Union Navy in implementing the "strangling of the Confederacy?" Many historians contend that the blockade was an important key to Federal victory, and some writers viewed the blockade as crucial. "It severely restricted the import of critically needed military supplies in a generally non-manufacturing Confederacy. It reduced to a mere trickle the export of cotton, the South's only big money producer, thus, severely crippling the entire economy and ability to maintain the war." (3:XVII1) and "...the blockade succeeded sufficiently to be a major determinant of Confederate defeat. " (1 :54)

J. Thomas Scharf, wrote in the preface to his History of the Confederate Navy, that the blockade "shut the Confederacy out from the world, deprived it of supplies, weakened its military and naval strength,...compelled exhaustion by requiring the consumption of everything grown or raised in the country," and finally determined the outcome of the war." (13:301)

In 1950, the southern historian, E. Merton Coulter wrote (in The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865), that "without a doubt the blockade was one of the outstanding causes of the strangulation and ultimate collapse of the Confederacy." (1:55) Also, in 1962, Rear Admiral Bern Anderson in his book, BY Sea and By River: The Naval

History of the Civil War stated, "without the relentless pressure of Union sea power...(economic disintegration) could not have been achieved. The blockade was the active instrument of that sea power, and it was one of the major factors that brought about the ultimate collapse and defeat of the South." (3:55)

Other historians and authors contend that the effectiveness of the Union blockade was limited--some say completely sieve-like. Blockade running became a growth industry, and huge fortunes were made by daring mariners who risked capture, or even death, eluding the Federal Navy.

In 1931, historian Frank Owsley described in a chapter entitled "The Ineffectiveness of the Blockade," of his book, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, that the blockade was a "leaky, ramshackle affair." (1:56) Owsley based his conclusion on successful deliveries to the South, numbers of blockade runners and the increase in cotton exports from the Confederate States. (1:56)

In *Lifeline of the Confederacy* written in 1988 and dealing with blockade running during the Civil War, author Stephen R. Wise concluded that the capture of seaports, not blockading the coast, was the more appropriate Federal maritime Strategy. (10:3) Also, he describes in detail how effectively the blockade runners waged their own campaign:

In terms of basic military necessities, the South imported at least 400,000 rifles, or more than 60 percent of the nation's modern arms. About 3 million pounds of lead came through the blockade, which by Gorgas's estimate amounted to one-third of the Army's requirements. Besides these items, over 2,250,000 pounds of saltpeter, or two-thirds of this vital ingredient for powder, came from overseas. Without blockade running the nation's military would have been without proper supplies of arms, bullets, and powder. Blockade running also supplied countless other essential items such as food, clothing, accouterments, chemicals, paper, and medicine. By the summer of 1862, the flow of supplies enabled the Confederate armies to stand up to the numerically superior Federals. Because of the work of the men involved in blockade running, a supply lifeline was maintained until

the very last months of the war. The Confederate soldiers had the equipment and food needed to meet their adversaries. Defeat did not come from the lack of material; instead the Confederacy simply no longer had the manpower to resist, and the nation collapsed. (10:226)

To summarize the blockade debate it is clear that the strategy was a good one and though it may not have determined the outcome of the Civil War, it absolutely influenced it. The difference may never be quantifiable, but the impact of the blockade ultimately reduced the Confederacy to restrict their trade and divert much energy and wealth circumventing the Union Navy and implementing counter strategy to defeat this particular component of federal maritime strategy. Furthermore, as eloquently stated by author William M. Fowler in his conclusion to Under Two Flags, The American Navy in the Civil War:

While historians still debate the economic impact of the blockade, they are sure of one of its effects. From a diplomatic and political perspective, the blockade managed to isolate the South. Lincoln's proclamation, backed by Union guns, gave a clear warning to any nation with notions of recognizing the South. Their collusion would raise a serious risk of war with the North, and no European power was ready to run that risk for the questionable benefits of southern friendship. (8:305)

B. MISSISSIPPI RIVER STRATEGY

The first order of business when developing a "divide and conquer" tactic such as the federal grand strategy envisioned by General Scott's Anaconda Plan, is to carefully analyze the geography of the battlefield. In this case, a major decision for the Federal war planners was to limit the field of play in the Western theater to something clearly definable. The Mississippi River, therefore, became central to this strategy. The "border states" of Kentucky, Missouri, West Virginia, and Maryland held mixtures of Union devotees as well as Southern sympathizers. Lincoln, himself a Kentuckian, carefully avoided any action which might drive Kentucky into the Confederacy. His successful

forestalling of offensive actions was rewarded in September 1861 when a newly elected state legislature declared themselves "pro-Union."

Both Presidents Lincoln and Davis realized the decisive strategic significance of the state in the coming struggle...Kentucky's population of 1,155,000 (plus 225,000 slaves) would have augmented the South's military manpower by about 20 percent. Geographically, Kentucky lay like a great wedge thrusting into the heart of the North...Second only to the Mississippi as an artery of commerce, and a potential avenue of war, the Ohio River rolled for more than 400 miles along Kentucky's Northern boundary. And, just above the great river--bordering it in places--lay the vital East-West railroads connecting the Northwestern states and their rich resources with the industrial Northwest... Small wonder that President Lincoln remarked: "I hope I have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky.' (7:19)

General John Charles Fremont assumed command of the Department of the West. Appointed by President Lincoln, He went west after conferring with General Scott and the President. General Fremont left Washington with the distinct impression, "that the great object in view was the descent of the Mississippi. To this end, he was to raise an Army and when ready to move down river, and inform the President." (9:XXV)

The key to federal war strategy with regard to executing the seizure and control of the Mississippi River relied upon joint Army and Navy operations. While Admiral David G. Farragut was planning the capture of New Orleans, combined fleet and land operations were being organized in the Northern reaches of the Mississippi. Flag Officer Farragut succeeded in two days, April 24-25 1862, in defeating the defenses of Forts Jackson and St Philip, (south of New Orleans), then destroying nine ships of the Confederate flotilla enroute to the capture of New Orleans. (7:48-57)

Meanwhile, upriver, armored Union river gunboats were commissioned, then employed by Flag Officer A.H. Foote to capture the strategic Tennessee River fortress at Fort Henry. On 14 February 1862, his gunboats attacked Fort Donelson on the

Cumberland River in conjunction with troops under Brigadier General U.S. Grant. Finally, the formidable Island Number Ten, key to Confederate defense of the upper Mississippi, surrendered. The combined effect of the loss of these three forts, coupled with the surrender of Memphis and occupation of the South's most important coastal city, "the Queen City of the South"--New Orleans--was that there now remained only one obstacle to total Union control of the Mississippi River--Vicksburg.

VI

CONFEDERATE COUNTER STRATEGY

The Confederate States Navy began the war outmanned, under-equipped, and disorganized. Realizing their significant vulnerability the senior Confederate leaders concentrated upon newly developing technology in order to offset the Federal numerical superiority afloat. If "necessity is the mother of invention" then she was extremely busy for the C. S. Navy, giving birth to two revolutionary underwater weapons and two new, specialized types of ships. The new and truly revolutionary weapons in the subsurface environment were submarines and sea-mines (then called "torpedoes") The two specialized ship types were armor plated ships (called "ironclads") and fast, stealthy, low silhouette ships for blockade running. These new "weapons systems" would not only make their mark on the naval history of the Civil War, but were the true forerunners of the current U. S. submarine fleet, mine warfare command, and the battleships of the coming World Wars. The blockade runners began building shallow draft, low superstructure, steam driven ships:

The vessels used for the purpose were typically long and narrow (about nine times as long as they were wide) side-wheelers with feathering paddles - and one or two raking funnels capable of being lowered close to the deck (for which reason they had forced draft boilers). Their freeboard was low and they were painted dull gray to minimize visibility. They had only two short masts with crows-nests on them and turtleback forecastle decks to enable them to drive through fairly heavy seas. To avoid telltale smoke they burned anthracite coal if it could be had; Welsh coal was an acceptable substitute, but soft coal was never used. (13:34)

The counter strategy technology which was most significant was the development of ironclad warships and mine warfare. The submarine, though it was to figure prominently in the next two World Wars, was in its infancy during the Civil War. The

specialized blockade runners were a wide ranging class of fast, stealthy vessels designed and operated to defeat the Union blockade. Though submarines and blockade runners were important components of the confederate strategy, torpedoes and ironclads took center stage during the conflict.

A. Torpedoes

"Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead, Drayton!" The oft cited quotation attributed to (then) Rear Admiral David Glasgow Farragut at the battle of Mobile Bay in August 1864 was in reference to the deadly mine field blocking the federal ships approach to the channel into Mobile Bay. (3:IV-1) The defenses of many southern sea ports like Wilmington, Charleston, and New Orleans were heavily fortified by these lethal devices. As a force equalizer, the underwater mine is a superb example of Confederate ingenuity and has been credited with sinking dozens of Union warships during the Civil War.

Matthew Fontaine Maury demonstrated a percussion triggered floating mine in June 1861, and within one month a Federal ship had picked up two of these revolutionary weapons. (2:123) The United States Navy Civil War Chronology 1861-1865 records that on 7 July 1861, "two floating torpedoes (mines) in the Potomac River were picked up by the USS RESOLUTE,--the earliest known use of torpedoes by the Confederates. During the course of the war, a variety of ingenious torpedoes destroyed or damaged some 40 Union ships, forecasting the vast growth- to come in this aspect of underwater naval warfare." (3:I-19)

A further description of Civil War 'torpedoes' appears in Milton F. Perry's Infernal Machines: The Story of Confederate Submarines and Mine Warfare:

"The Confederates used many different types of torpedoes ranging from sealed barrels to metal tanks holding 2,000 pounds of powder. Those most often used in the eastern theater were made of copper, tin, or iron, and held between 100 and 150 pounds of powder. The most destructive, of course, were the largest." (2:123) A further description of this unique Confederate weapon: "Most of these mines were of the impact type; detonated by percussion caps which exploded when a ship's bottom scraped them. In some cases, mines were detonated by electrical--and unreliable--control from ashore. Here was the birth of submarine mining; crude and inefficient, perhaps, but brilliant in concept and improvisation. Mines became a major hazard to all Union Naval operations against southern ports." (7:286)

That the defensive mine warfare strategy employed by the South was effective is clear. What is particularly noteworthy about this component of counterstrategy is how organized an endeavor it became. In October 1862, the Confederate Navy Torpedo Bureau, (Richmond, Virginia) and a Naval Submarine Battery Service was formalized by the Confederate Congress. Their charter was to "organize and improve methods of torpedo warfare." (3:II-105) Throughout the war the mine warfare tactics of the South posed serious threats to the Federal Navy. Secretary of the Navy Welles, at war's end, observed that the torpedoes were: "always formidable in harbors and internal waters, and...have been more destructive to our Naval vessels than all other means combined." (3:II-105)

The psychological threat of being sunk by a lethal underwater explosion--which could wreck the hulls of even the most modern Union warships--was potent. Describing

the sinking of a troop transport in March 1865, Brigadier General Gabriel J. Rains, Superintendent of the Confederate Torpedo Corps reported: "The vessel, USS THORN, sunk as usual in such cases, in two minutes..." (3:V-56) The loss of the ship pointed out that though Union ships may have had numerous advantages on the seas and in the rivers, they did not have complete freedom of movement. "The presence--or even the suspected presence--of Confederate torpedoes forced the Navy to move more slowly than would have been otherwise possible." (3:V-56)

B. IRONCLADS

"Inequality of numbers may be compensated by invulnerability," Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory pronounced in 1861. Thus, not only does economy, but Naval success, dictate the wisdom and expediency of fighting with iron against wood, without regard to cost." (6: 187)

Mallory knew that he could never meet the Union Navy on equal terms. The construction of "ironclad" ships was his answer to reducing the Federal's numerical superiority at sea, and along the rivers. In July 1861, Mallory reported:

The frigate USS MERRIMACK has been raised and docked at the expense of \$6,000, and the necessary repairs to hull and machinery to place her in her former condition is estimated by experts at \$450,000. The vessel would then be in the river, and by the blockade of the enemy's fleets and batteries rendered comparatively useless. It has, therefore been determined to shield her completely with three inch iron, placed at such angles as to render her ball-proof, to complete her at the earliest moment, to send her with the heaviest ordnance, and to send her at once against the enemy's fleet. It is believed that thus prepared she will be able to content successfully against the heaviest of the enemy's ships, and to drive them from Hampton Roads and the ports of Virginia. (14:221)

It was this philosophy of Confederate military strategy which produced the South's first ironclad warship, CSS VIRGINIA. In March 1862, the Union Navy learned the value of ironclad ships when CSS VIRGINIA ravaged two of the finest battleships of the U. S. Navy in Hampton Roads: The USS CONGRESS (50 guns) and USS CUMBERLAND (50 guns) were destroyed. When the smoke cleared the Confederate ironclad had "destroyed two of the most heavily armed vessels without the slightest effective opposition." (13:93)

Ironclads, that is, heavily armored ships bearing deck cannons, played significant roles during the Civil War for both Navies. When the Federal ironclad, USS MONITOR met and battled the CSS VIRGINIA in March 1862, all informed observers knew that the future of Naval warfare had suddenly changed. The CSS VIRGINIA was sent from the Norfolk yards, "to break the Federal blockade at Hampton Roads, its most important single point--either by ramming and staving in the wooden sidewalls at the ships in the roads or by destroying with hot shot the hulls that sought shelter under Fortress Monroe." (11:100)

Confederate Secretary of the Navy Mallory wrote the Committee on Naval Affairs of Congress: "Naval engagements between wooden frigates, as they are now built and armed, will prove to be the forlorn hopes of the sea, simply contests in which the question, not of victory, but of who shall go to the bottom first, is to be solved." (3:I-13) And so, the Confederate Navy embarked upon a shipbuilding program to capitalize on this new strategy of employing a few heavily armored ships versus the many Union wooden ones.

"The marvel...is not that the Confederacy did so poorly with its Navy, but that it did so well. Almost uniformly, her ironclads gave the Federal Navy much trouble, and it is worth recording that most of them finally failed not because they were poorly designed, but because the industrial facilities that could put them into first-class shape...did not exist." (6:175)

The Confederate Navy valiantly faced the superior Federal Navy, but was forced into a defensive strategy from the beginning. As the Union Army learned in earlier riverine excursions, the U. S. Navy could significantly assist in the rapid movement of troops. Determined to fully execute the Anaconda Plan in the Western Theater, the ArmyNavy team concentrated on their remaining task on the Mississippi River.

In the fifth month of the war, Edward Bates, Attorney General of the United States, wrote in his dairy "that river (the Mississippi) is one and indivisible and one power will control it from Pittsburgh to New Orleans...the government may be changed, but the river cannot be divided." (9:XX) Vicksburg, was the last obstacle separating the Union military from sweeping the Confederates from the Mississippi.

VII

VICKSBURG

"The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket!"
The speaker, pointing to Vicksburg on a map of the South, was Lincoln, (10:31)

Vicksburg's position was very nearly impregnable...commanding a presence over the river was only part of its importance for the Confederacy...it was also a choke point on the North-South axis and a link from the West to the East. Opposite Vicksburg in De Soto was the terminus of the Shreveport and Vicksburg railroad...with the fall of New Orleans and Memphis, Vicksburg became the only significant link between the Confederacy's bread basket in the West and its hungry armies in the East. Its capture, if achieved, would split the Confederacy and shorten rations in the Rebel Army.
(8:185, 186)

All eyes, North and South, were on the last Citadel of the Confederacy. A series of campaigns led by Grant and Sherman from December 1862 until July 1863 were required to dislodge the 30,000 CSA troops under Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton. Grant, concluding that an overland approach to Vicksburg was unwise and would require diverting too many forces to protect his supply lines, employed the U. S. Navy to outflank the fixed batteries of the city and attack Vicksburg from the South. Vicksburg, situated on the right (East) bank of the river at a dramatic 180 degree turn in the river commanded a superb field of fire of the river for miles up and downstream. Grant was North of the objective, and was encamped on the left (West) bank. His plan proposed to move his 36,000 troops down the West side of the Mississippi "by marching and partly by boats on the bayou," (7:255) to Hard Times Landing, Louisiana, then transport the men across the river to Bruinsburg, Mississippi on Navy transports which had successfully run the Vicksburg batteries. This joint operation came off surprisingly well.

"Never has there been closer or more effective interservice coordination than existed between General Grant and his Army on the one hand, and Admiral Porter and his Naval Squadron on the other." (4:255)

U. S. Grant then consolidated his Army and drove inland to capture Jackson, Mississippi, thereby cutting Vicksburg's rail connections. Subsequent to a failed direct assault on the city, Generals Grant and Sherman, and Admiral Porter waged a six-week siege of Vicksburg. Finally, on the 4th of July 1863, Vicksburg surrendered. Reflecting on the fall of Vicksburg, Admiral Porter wrote:

What bearing this will have on the rebellion remains yet to be seen, but the magnitude of the success must go far toward crushing out this revolution and establishing once more the commerce of the States bordering on this river...The capture of Vicksburg leaves us a large Army and Naval forces free to act all along the river...the effect of this blow will be felt far up the tributaries of the Mississippi. (3:III- 106,106)

President Lincoln wrote:

The Father of Waters (Mississippi River) again goes unvexed to the sea...Nor must Uncle Sam's web feet be forgotten. At all the watery margins, they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks. (3:111-110)

The Civil War historian and author, Bruce Catton, wrote about Vicksburg:

Gettysburg ruined a Confederate offensive, but Vicksburg broke the Confederacy into halves and inflicted a wound that would ultimately prove mortal. Losing at Gettysburg, the Confederates had lost more than they could well afford to lose; at Vicksburg, they lost what they could not afford at all. (6:295)

VIII

CONCLUSION

Union military power in the Civil War was significantly strengthened due to the clear superiority of the Federal Navy. The generals and admirals learned early in the war about the multiplying effect of "joint warfare,"--thereby capitalizing upon the combined strength of the Army-Navy team.

Confederate leaders, though operating on their own homeland, suffered under the overwhelming leadership of ever being outflanked, at having large caliber guns of ships suddenly appear at vulnerable points, of witnessing secure lines collapse when Union armies penetrated them by river, of difficult logistics while more steamers poured in supplies for the Federals, of being stuck in the mud while the Union Army outmaneuvered by ship. (3:XIV)

Besides the obvious advantage of controlling the western theater rivers by exploiting "joint operations," the federal government gained other important benefits subsequent to the victory at Vicksburg: psychological and symbolic advantage. As has been described, naval power afloat first defeated, then occupied, the Mississippi River cities of the Confederacy. This isolated the trans-Mississippi States and paved the way for the final campaigns which eventually compelled the South's surrender. Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, commanding the principal western Army of the Confederacy, surrendered Vicksburg to General U.S. Grant on 4 July 1863, under the conditions that his 30,000 men would not be imprisoned, but rather "paroled." This meant they were free to go home and would not be harmed or interred as long as they did not re-enter the war. The psychological and symbolic importance of this is important. (Lincoln, upon hearing of this unusual pact, did uphold and honor the conditions of the surrender.) The Union had all the trappings of victory. Not only had they won at Vicksburg, and now

controlled the Mississippi, they had also defeated a superb field army deep in southern territory and mercifully spared their lives by not imprisoning them.

The momentum for a "death blow," though, was clearly increasing and embodied in the form of Major General William T. Sherman. He succeeded General Grant as commander in the West subsequent to Vicksburg. Propelled by that victory, and filled with confidence, he returned to Jackson, Mississippi, where he so destroyed the town and surrounding railways that his troops called it "Chimneyville." Then in the Spring of 1864, he proceeded with three armies to Atlanta, where he captured and burned the city and began his infamous "March to the Sea." Cutting a swath from Atlanta to Savannah he then turned North and razed Columbia, South Carolina. The viciousness of this destructive march through Georgia and South Carolina has been cited as "breaking the will" of the southern people and convinced the Confederate leadership to end the war.

The U. S. Navy dominated the Mississippi River and established Naval supremacy along the blockaded Southern coasts. Federal strategy, envisioned by General Winfield Scott in 1860, proved to be sound. Without a potent Navy, however, the Anaconda Plan could not have been successful. "The Union Navy was a powerful partner to the Northern Army, and its share in the Battle for the Republic should not be forgotten." (8:309)

The Federal Navy proved superior to the Confederate States Navy. When properly paired with the Union Army, President Lincoln's "ace-in-the hole" delivered the winning hand, and weighed heavily in the victory to preserve the United States of America.

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